

**SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS MASTER PLAN
FOR STRAWBERRY HILL AVENUE**

Norwalk, Connecticut

VISION

- **Improve safety**
 - Teaching children pedestrian and bicycle safety
 - Making physical improvements in the routes to schools that help reduce pedestrian and bicycle crashes on the journey to and from school
- **Improve security**
 - Identify locations and routes for children to avoid
- **Enhance children's well-being**
 - Encourage walking or biking to school
 - Reduce obesity in children
 - Improve air quality
- **Reduce traffic congestion in and around schools**
 - By 5- 10% on local roadways during school day
 - By 5-10% all children's trips to school by car or school bus
- **Improve community**
 - Encourage healthy and active lifestyles
 - Reduce fuel consumption
 - Enhance community accessibility and involvement

THE PROGRAM

The Norwalk Program is modeled on the "Safe Routes to Schools" program, an international program encouraging safer walking and biking routes to school and providing safety and educational training to students about walking and biking. This program utilizes the "5E's". They are:

- **Engineering** – Identify needed operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools to help reduce speed and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, establish safer crossings, walkways, trails and bikeways
- **Education** – Teach children bicycle and walking safety, driver safety campaigns
- **Enforcement** – Ensure traffic laws are obeyed with (i.e., speed enforcement, crossing guard programs)
- **Encouragement** – Using special events and activities to help promote walking and bicycling
- **Evaluation** – Monitoring and documenting outcomes and trends to document effectiveness

KEY ISSUES

Strawberry Hill Avenue is a minor arterial street in Norwalk on which three schools are located; Naromake Elementary School, Nathan Hale Middle School and Norwalk High School. In 2006, the street has an average daily traffic (ADT) of 12000 vehicles with an 85th percentile speed of 42 MPH and an average speed of 35 MPH, both in excess of the posted speed limit.

Parents and residents have expressed concern on several occasions that the travel speed on this road routinely exceeds the speed limit, making it unsafe for the children and residents to walk the sidewalks or cross the street. In March 2006, a traffic safety forum concerning Strawberry Hill Avenue was held by the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association that brought out dozens of residents who voiced their opinions on several issues including the need for the installation of a traffic signal at Tierney Street and the addition of more pedestrian crossings.

Other physical improvements that need to be made include the addition of sidewalk ramps at several intersections and additional traffic calming measures such as raised crossings, tree planting, curb bumpouts, etc.

Also identified as deficiencies are a lack of programs to educate children on bicycle and walking safety, constant enforcement of traffic laws, and encouragement of students to walk and bicycle to school. A need to evaluate the effectiveness of the Safe Routes to School Program is required.

THE PARTNERS

The success of the program is greatly dependent on the team members. For this project, the team shall consist of the school principals, PTO, School District's transportation office, Department of Public Works (Traffic Engineer and City Engineer), and the Police Department.

THE SOLUTIONS

ENGINEERING

PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

New Traffic Signal at Tierney Street- The installation of a traffic signal at the intersection of Strawberry Hill Avenue and Tierney Street with a pedestrian phase will provide the only dedicated pedestrian crossing for Nathan Hale students that reside on the western side of Strawberry Hill south of Tierney Street.

New Pedestrian Crossing at Alrowood Drive – The installation of a dedicated pedestrian crossing at Alrowood Drive and Strawberry Hill Avenue will provide a dedicated pedestrian crossing for Naromake and Norwalk high students that reside on the western side of Strawberry Hill north of King Street and south of County Street.

Curb Ramps – All of the intersections need to be upgraded to current ADA standards with proper ramps and tactile strips.

BICYCLE LANES

Bicycle Lane – The width and topography of Strawberry Hill Avenue is perfectly suited for the installation of a bicycle lane. The bicycle lane would greatly encourage students that live south of I-95 to bike to school and interrelate with students that live in the neighborhoods north of I-95.

TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES

Raised Intersections – Raised intersections should be provided at selected intersections including Strawberry Hill Avenue and Tierney Street to help calm traffic.

Lane Striping – In 2001, the City added shoulder striping to give the appearance of a narrower street. The City will remove this shoulder striping and replace with dedicated bike lanes.

Traffic Management Plan – A traffic management plan will be prepared for Strawberry Hill Avenue to help identify additional traffic calming and management measures that can be taken to help slow traffic.

OTHER ENGINEERING MEASURES

The Department of Public Works has worked with several schools to revise circulation, install school zone crossing signs, construct and repair footpaths, and provide or revise lot striping. These measures would be available to all schools subject to request and available funding.

EDUCATION

Presently, the Police Department provides bicycle and walking safety to school students on an as-requested basis. The Police Department will continue to support this program and encourage local organizations and schools to utilize this service.

In addition, the Police Department's DARE program offers bicycle and walking safety instruction to the fifth grade students at Naromake Elementary School.

ENFORCEMENT

The Police Department annually holds “Norwalk Slow-Down Days”, a week-long effort of enforcement and giveaways to reward drivers for good traffic behavior and to discourage speeding in Norwalk. Every year during “Norwalk Slow-Down Days”, there is an increased police presence on Strawberry Hill to enforce proper driving habits.

The Norwalk Public Works Department has mobile speed display signs that are often placed on Strawberry Hill. In addition, Public Works has placed permanent flashing speeding signs on Strawberry Hill near Nathan Hale. The Department will continue to use and expand on these types of enforcement measures.

ENCOURAGEMENT

The Norwalk Police Department and Sound Cycles sponsor an annual bicycle rodeo for school age children. In addition, the PTO’s of the schools are encouraged to participate in activity such as Annual Walk to School Week.

The Norwalk Health Department sponsors the “Become a NorWALKER” program, which identifies portions of Strawberry Hill Avenue as Walking Routes. This project promotes healthy lifestyles and cardiovascular health. The NorWALKER project was the recipient of the 2005 CT Greenways Council Special Achievement Award. The Health Department has made a commitment to this program and will encourage students and adults to “Become a NorWALKER”.

The PTO and Norwalk Public Schools will be encouraged to take part in and sponsor programs such as the “Annual Walk to School Week” and solicit support from area businesses.

EVALUATION

A parent survey and classroom survey were developed to gather data on current behaviors and attitudes.